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A

Quarter of an Hour before Dinner;

OR,

QUALITY BINDING.

A

DRAMATIC ENTERTAINMENT

OF ONE ACT;

AS PERFORMED AT THE

THEATRE ROYAL

IN THE

HAY-MARKET.

*By John Rose*

THE SECOND EDITION.

L O N D O N:

Printed for W. LOWNDES, No. 77, Fleet Street.

M.DCC.LXXXVIII.

Price One Shilling, sewed.

Quarter of an Hour before Dinner;

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EVERY literary effort, feeble as it may be, that would inculcate any private virtue, should be dedicated to private worth ; on this ground alone the following TRIFLE would claim Mr. COLMAN's protection—but he has farther demands on the Author—the manner in which he received it, the attention he paid to the representation, require his public thanks; and he gives them to him with all his heart.—To the PERFORMERS he is little less indebted for adding colour and force to a work so inconsiderable. He congratulates the PUBLIC in being able to bear with a single ACT of plain, common life, that endeavoured to speak to the heart rather than the fancy; and entrusts it to their perusal under the hope that they will relish it with the same pleasure, and receive it with the same indulgence in the closet as at the theatre.

*EVERY literary effort, feeble as it may  
be, that would inculcate any private virtue,  
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ground, the following persons would  
claim Mr. Colman's protection—but he has*

**DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.**

**MR. LEVEL, - - - MR. WILLIAMSON.**

**COL. MODISH, - - MR. DAVIES.**

**LD. SIMPER, - - - MR. R. PALMER,**

**SIR W. WEALTHY, MR. KEMBLE.**

**MR. PLAINWELL, - MR. AICKIN.**

**JOHN - - - - MR. PHILLIMORE.**

**WILLIAM, - - - MR. ABBOTT.**

**AND**

**MRS. LEVEL, - - MRS. BROOKS.**



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A

## Quarter of an Hour before Dinner.

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SCENE *a Saloon with folding Doors, which being open discover John laying a Cloth with Covers.*

*Enter Level.*

*Level.*

PRETTY preparations, truly! — John.

*John.* Sir.

*Level.* What, are we to have company to-day?

*John.* No, Sir; only my mistress's friends.

*Level.* Your mistress's friends!

*John.* Yes, Sir, my Lord Simper, his uncle the Colonel, and Sir William Wealthy.

*Level.* Do they dine here?

*John.* My mistress ordered me to lay knives and forks for 'em.

*Level.* Very well; put two more.

*John.* Sir!—What, without orders?

*Level.* Yes, Sir, for me and Mr. Plainwell.

*John.*

*John.* Mr. Plainwell!—Do you think, Sir, my mistress will be pleased to have a tradesman placed at the same table with men of distinction?

*Level.* But that tradesman, puppy, is my friend.

*John.* Lord, Sir, that's no reason at all—it is the last place at which one generally meets one's friends.

*Level.* But I've engag'd him——

*John.* But my mistress will be out of humour.

*Level.* That's my concern. Do you lay a knife and fork for him..

*John.* (*Apart.*) The devil take me if I do though, without telling my mistress. [*Exit.*

*Level, solus.*

My Lord Simper, the Colonel, and Sir William——Ay, at my house they squeeze my hand, and call me their good friend; abroad they *crane* me, (*Stretching out his neck.*) or if we meet so full, as obliges them to notice me, they say, with a cool insolent indifference, “How d’ye do?” and make me blush at the honour I receive.—Of what use are they?—I ask this question of my wife every day, and every day in vain.—Egad, a thought strikes me: since reasoning is lost on her, I’ll try the power of facts, and shew her her good friends



friends in their true colours.—Now to compose my countenance for the part.

*Enter Mrs. Level.*

*Mrs. L.* What's this John tells me, my dear?

*Level.* I really don't know, my dear.

*Mrs. L.* Why, that you have ordered him to lay a plate for Mr. Plainwell.

*Level.* Yes, yes, to be sure I did.

*Mrs. L.* Does that *Being* dine here?

*Level.* I've engag'd him.

*Mrs. L.* You must put him off.

*Level.* Impossible; it is too late—I expect him every moment.

*Mrs. L.* You shou'd have given me notice, Sir. I can't submit to place him with people of rank.

*Level.* These gentlemen are *your* friends, Plainwell is *mine*. I receive them out of complaisance to you; do you receive him out of love to me.

*Mrs. L.* But, my dear, only think what a strange looking figure——

*Level.* Now in my mind he's a very good figure; beside, he's a good man, an excellent companion, and never without his little joke.

*Mrs. L.* Fye, fye, my dear, the man's a downright vulgar citizen.

*Level.*

*Level.* Wou'd you have a tradesman ape the dress and air of a lord?

*Mrs. L.* Why not?—'Tis vastly in fashion.

*Level.* Yes—among bankrupt swindlers to keep up false credit, and ignorant shopmen at the expence of their masters.

*Mrs. L.* Men of such a figure as Mr. Plainwell are well enough behind counters, but not at one's table. We shou'd arrange one's company, you know.

*Level.* Arrange!—If my Lord thinks himself dishonour'd to sit next my friend, let him dine with his own, sharpers and dice-coggers. I am tired of receiving company, who despise me while they are complimenting the flavour of my venison and excellence of my wine.

*Mrs. L.* These are strange fancies, Sir; whimsical, dirty, trade-bred fancies.—There is not one of them but has offered you their services a thousand times a day.

*Level.* Yes, because they know well enough I have hitherto had no occasion for them.

*Mrs. L.* You are ever mistrustful, Sir.

*Level.* Softy, softly—you are sure their professions are sincere?

*Mrs. L.* Very sure.

*Level.* And that they are ready to extricate me from any difficulty?

*Mrs. L.* Assuredly.

*Level.* 'Tis lucky, for I stand at this moment in a most distressing predicament.

*Mrs. L.* Is it possible?

*Level.*



*Level.* Very possible.—I have been weak enough to lend my name to one who was thought as good a man as any upon 'Change; his wife, it seems, was a very extravagant woman, fond of keeping *quality* company.—He stopp'd payment this morning, and I am obliged to take up a bill for a thousand pounds, which must be found in the course of the day, and all my money went for the last new purchase.

*Mrs. L.* Does this make you uneasy?

*Level.* Is it not enough to do so?

*Mrs. L.* Have you no friends, Mr. Level?

*Level.* Friends, Ma'am! Shew me the man who has any.

*Mrs. L.* I have.

*Level.* You flatter yourself.

*Mrs. L.* Either of those who are to dine with us would take pleasure in assisting you, and the only thing which embarrasses me is to which I shall give the preference. Lord Simper won three thousand last night at *vingt un*, and the Colonel received yesterday two and twenty hundred for an old account of Sir William.

*Level.* If I might advise, try the first that comes.

William announces Colonel Modish.

*Mrs. L.* Well, Colonel, I've been waiting for you with impatience.

B

Col.

*Col.* You are too good, Ma'am; don't my nephew Lord Simper, and Sir William dine with us?

*Mrs. L.* We expect 'em.

— *Col.* So much the better, we shall be as gay as larks—you give most exquisite dinners; does'n't she, Mr. Level?

*Mrs. L.* My cook is tolerable.

*Col.* Oh, exquisite! I should adore him; but really you and Mrs. Level make such good use of him, it would be a shame to take him from you.

*Mrs. L.* Ah, Colonel! you are much inclined to be luxurious!

*Col.* Inclined, Ma'am! say that I am so; one must have some little amiable defect to be fit for good company—beside, what should I do with my money but for regaling my friends—I obtained an order from the treasury yesterday, for arrears due the last war, and—

*Mrs. L.* Your nephew will not be sorry for that, Colonel.

*Col.* My nephew shall never enjoy a farthing of it.

*Level.* Why, he is your nearest relation.

*Col.* My relations are my friends, and the unfortunate—

*Mrs. L.* But, how do you mean to use all your money?

*Col.* Keep it, Madam; it never gives a man trouble.

*Mrs.*



*Mrs. L.* How do you dispose of it?

*Col.* In my strong box.

*Level.* But then you lose the interest.

*Col.* But then I don't risk the capital.

*Mrs. L.* I have a mind to dispose of a thousand for you, and in a manner that will give you infinite pleasure.

*Col.* Pleasure! in what way?

*Mrs. L.* Have you not a regard for my husband?

*Col.* A most sincere one.

*Level.* Much obliged to you, Sir!

*Mrs. L.* He has a pressing occasion for a thousand guineas—

*Col.* Ay!

*Mrs. L.* Yes; and I've assur'd him he may rely upon you.

*Col.* Madam, my regard is too violent; I can never submit to losing my friend.

*Level.* Losing your friend, Sir?

*Col.* Yes; every man loses his friend that lends him money.

*Mrs. L.* To whom do you lend, then?

*Col.* To nobody, Madam.

*Mrs. L.* To a friend in distress?

*Col.* Why should I distress myself, or risk my own property to save that of another.—As long as Mr. Level may stand in need of my recommendation or my table, let him make use of them without ceremony; my purse is open to no man.

*Level.* Then you lose one of the greatest pleasures of life.

*Col.* A pleasure I've been long since cured of—formerly, like all young men at their first *entrè*, I was infected with the vice of obliging—what did I get? Ten monsters of ingratitude, and not one friend. *Mrs. Level*, good morning — *Mr. Level*, your humble servant.

*Mrs. L.* Won't you dine with us, Colonel?

*Col.* I cannot have that honour; I have just recollected a previous engagement, or else——

*Level.* Oh, Sir, no ceremony between friends. — *[Exit Col.]*

*Enter John.*

*Level.* John.

*John.* Sir.

*Level.* Take away the Colonel's knife and fork.

*Mrs. L.* And never set it again.

*Level.* Well!

*Mrs. L.* He's a monster.

*Level.* Like the rest.

*Mrs. L.* How could I expect kindness from a wretch who denies his relations!

*Level.* "His relations are his friends and the unfortunate."

*Mrs. L.* It is very singular that men who have the least feeling should talk most of benevolence.

*Level.*



*Level.* It costs nothing—'tis the same with courage and honesty.

*Mrs. L.* A man of condition too.

*Level.* Live with your equals, 'tis amongst them are to be found some old-fashioned principles, some precious relics of that ancient frankness and benevolence which can alone form the solid basis of friendship.

*Mrs. L.* Mr. Plainwell, for example.

*Level.* I should place a greater confidence on him than on lords.

*Mrs. L.* Well; here he is — entrust him with your embarrassment—

*Level.* And he'll relieve me.

*Enter Mr. Plainwell.*

*Plainwell.* Morrow, morrow — fine day; plaguy hot—I come to dine with you.

*Mrs. L.* You do us great honour.

*Plainwell.* Not much of that; but I'll do honour to your dinner; running about to the four corners whets my appetite; and all for nothing—no pay, no cash—what the devil's become of the money.

*Mrs. L.* You are worth a large sum, Mr. Plainwell.

*Plainwell.* In figures, Ma'am; on my books.—I'm in such a rage; but I'll vent it on your wine.—Why it's near four.

*Level.* Yes; but my wife expects Sir William and Lord Simper.

*Plainwell.*

*Plainwell.* That is to say, there are no hopes of dinner till six. — John, bring me a crust, and a glass of wine; let it be good, d'ye hear.

*Mrs. L.* What a barbarian. (*Aside.*)

*Plainwell.* Level, I'm not pleas'd with you.

*Level.* Why so?

*Plainwell.* You are not in spirits; heark'ee, your wife expects some fine gentlemen; my company may be disagreeable; tell me so; I can dine on a chop.

*Level.* What an idea! — Indeed my spirits are flurried — I have been weak enough to answer for a man who has just fail'd, and must find a thousand guineas immediately.

*Plainwell.* A thousand and fifty pounds immediately — have you it by you?

*Level.* No.

*Plainwell.* Nor I neither.

*John.* (*Offering the bread and glass.*) Here, Sir.

*Plainwell.* (*Taking up his hat and cane.*) The devil take it. — [*Exit.*

*Mrs. L.* John.

*John.* Madam.

*Mrs. L.* Take away Mr. Plainwell's knife and fork for ever. — “Let us keep company with our equals; there you'll find some old-fashioned principles.”

*Level.* His conduct astonishes more than disturbs me; I asked him for nothing.

*Mrs.*



*Mrs. L.* He had too much prudence to wait for it.

*Will.* My Lord Simper.

*Enter Lord Simper.*

*Lord S.* My dear Mrs. Level, how do you look sweetly ! I devote the day to you now—Don't you expect the Colonel ? I do long to see him.

*Mrs. L.* The honour of a visit from him would distress me very much.

*Lord S.* Have you quarrelled ?—I do congratulate you most heartily—a tedious, tiresome puppy !—but that we are related, and his odd guineas may sometimes be of service to me, we should never meet. But what was the dispute ?

*Mrs. L.* He had just received two thousand guineas from—

*Lord S.* I helped him to it—the ungrateful !—Well—

*Mrs. L.* Mr. Level was in want of half of it.

*Lord S.* What, this dear fellow ?—What a thoughtless dog am I ! Egad, I did not see you before ; do you dine with us ?

*Level.* I hope so, my Lord.

*Lord S.* That's well, that's well (*shaking him by the hand*)—But I must abuse you—hah—some snug little chicken !—hah ! you shall

shall introduce me to her—extravagant;—hah, rot 'em, they're all so!—[*Apart.*]

*Mrs. L.* But to return to the Colonel—

*Lord S.* True, true, we were on his eternal chapter—

*Mrs. L.* He refused me the money.

*Lord S.* Like him, like him—but why not apply to me, my dear Madam? I would sacrifice my life to oblige you.

*Mrs. L.* Young men, my Lord, are sometimes embarrassed.

*Lord S.* I embarrass'd!—oh, Lord, never!—but your husband has no confidence in me; he does not know my love for him—but let's see, what is this matter?

*Level.* I have been weak enough to be bound for one who has failed.

*Lord S.* That's nothing new in the world—a common thing!

*Level.* And if the money cannot be procured, I'm ruined.

*Lord S.* Ruined!—why every body are ruined—a clear case! and does this alarm you? Come, come, I should not dine contented till it is settled.

*Mrs. L.* (*Apart.*) Well—

*Level.* (*Apart.*) I could not have thought it.

*Lord S.* Take your hat, my carriage waits, and we'll go instantly——

*Level.* Where, my Lord?

*Lord*



*Lord S.* To my attorney's—the best fellow in England—a civil rascal—that, if your house was full, would rid you of all uncivil rascals in an hour: he'll soon settle your scoundrel creditors; he pays all mine. I'll, I'll—egad, it's good sport!—I'll shew you some day how he manages them; they are glad to give me what time I ask.

*Level.* It is not time, but money that I want.

*Lord S.* That he never parts with—but you've only passed your word.

*Level.* It was on that the money was lent.

*Lord S.* Give your word to pay when you are able.

*Level.* That will not be fulfilling my engagement.

*Lord S.* Don't we make engagements every day under a certainty of breaking them?

*Level.* Mine I hold sacred.

*Lord S.* You've made one, you see, that is not likely to be fulfilled, at least in your way; why, is not every body in debt?—Do let me settle it for you,

*Mrs. L.* You may easily do that, my Lord, a part of the money you won last night—

*Lord S.* Is inviolably sacred, for I promised to give the revenge to-night, and may lose it all again. But, my dear fellow, if you go to my attorney's, depend on his fidelity.—Adieu.

*Level.* I'm your Lordship's very humble servant.

C

*Lord*

*Lord S.* You may always rely upon me, my dear friend ; you'll find me at all times ready to serve you ; at present, indeed, the Duke expects me. [Exit.

*Level.* There goes a third friend, the fourth remains but to strengthen my opinion.

*Mrs. L.* And can Wealthy——

*Level.* He's a banker, and knows the value of money.

*Mrs. L.* He has so much of it.

*Level.* Does he think he has enough ?

*Mrs. L.* The sum is so trifling to him.

*Level.* Can he gain any thing by it ?

*Mrs. L.* The pleasure of obliging a distressed friend.

*Level.* That's a traffic little known upon 'Change—but I'll leave you with him, to endeavour at reclaiming the privileges of friendship.

*Mrs. L.* And can I expect to find more benevolence in him than in men born in a superior rank ? How have I chosen my companions ! But it was the choice of pride, not of the heart.

*Enter William.*

*Will.* Sir William Wealthy.

*Enter*



*Enter Sir William Wealthy.*

*Sir Will.* I confess, Madam, to have outstayed my time, but necessity must plead my excuse; we had a meeting of the profession to consider a proposal of the minister—not nine per cent.—it won't do, Madam, not a soul was pleased, and all complaining of bad times.

*Mrs. L.* You was not ungrateful enough to be of the number.

*Sir Will.* Oh, no, every thing succeeds with me.

*Mrs. L.* You are a happy man.

*Sir Will.* A hundred per cent. more than I deserve.—Where are our friends? I saw the Colonel upon 'Change for an instant, who swore he would not miss dining with you for another regiment.

*Mrs. L.* You'll meet them no more here. You know them both to be in cash—Mr. Level wanted money, and they both refused him.

*Sir Will.* So much the better, why didn't he come to me? I could raise a hundred thousand in an hour—How much does he want?

*Mrs. L.* A thousand guineas.

*Sir Will.* So trifling a business is rather beneath me; but to oblige you, Madam—How happens it? Relate, and I'll tell you whether the business is good or bad.

*Mrs. L.* Mr. Level was bound—

*Sir Will.* Oh, aye—his friend fails, and he in concert wants to buy in the debt.

*Mrs. L.* He is incapable of an act of such baseness—he was bound——

*Sir Will.* He should not have been bound without the amount in hand; here stand I, who would not be bound for my brother—who answers, pays.

*Mrs. L.* That's what Mr. Level wishes.

*Sir Will.* It is very proper to assist one's friends when they're making money, but never when they are throwing it away, when they have no prudence, when they are bound for people.

*Mrs. L.* Then, Sir William, we are not to depend upon you.

*Sir Will.* Certainly not.—Yet if Mr. Level can give good security—Harkee, let him call at my office; I'll recommend him to my first clerk—he undertakes matters of this sort; for my part, I never meddle with them. He's a very obliging man, and if he finds there's no risk, why, on my recommendation, he'll be happy to oblige Mr. Level.—You have jewels, Ma'am, you may be some time without them—I dare say they'll do.

*Mrs. L.* Then your obliging clerk is a pawnbroker.

*Sir Will.* Every banker, Madam, has ladies jewels in his possession some time or other.

*Mrs. L.* Mr. Level will be back directly; you may explain more fully to him.

*Sir*



*Sir Will.* Oh no, he knows the nature of business—beside, I'm extremely sorry, but it is impossible for me to wait.—Let him see my clerk, d'ye mind; I'll speak to him first.  
—Your servant. [Exit.

*John.* Ma'am! [Lifting up a knife and fork.

*Mrs. L.* Yes, John, and for ever.

*Enter Mr. Level.*

*Level.* Well—Sir William—

*Mrs. L.* Is—like the rest. You knew mankind better than I did—they are monsters.

*Level.* Not all. We are, I hope, unfortunate in our acquaintance.

*Mrs. L.* Oh! I hate them all together.

*Level.* Your hatred, as your love was, is too extensive; there is a just medium. Place no improper confidence, you'll seldom be deceived—ask few favours, and you may sometimes be obliged—respect the name of friend, but endeavour never to put it to the proof.

*Mrs. L.* Friend! there is none.

*Level.* Perhaps, but few. I wish'd to effect your conviction.

*Mrs. L.* But who is to extricate you?

[Noise within.

*Enter Plainwell.*

*Plainwell.* I tell you, I will come in.

*Level.* Is it you, Mr. Plainwell?

*Plain-*

*Plainwell.* Yes I, who have wish'd you at the devil a thousand times. Here, take this infernal money, and do give me some dinner, for God's sake.—I'm half dead with fatigue and hunger.

*Mrs. L.* And have you had the kindness to——

*Plainwell.* To what—serve my friend?—You must have little regard for me, if you think this an obligation.

*Level.* If you knew but how much I am indebted to you.

*Plainwell.* Give me the money again, then.

*Level.* But, hear me; To cure this Lady of her fondness for brilliant company, I have feigned an urgency that she might try the value of tinsel'd friendship—the event has succeeded beyond my hopes—you have exhibited the picture of a proper alliance, the spirit of true friendship.—The traffick between hearts for the benefit of both is mutual assistance.—This is a commercial country; may it spread through the whole kingdom.

*Plainwell.* You don't want the cash, then.

*Level.* Indeed I do not.

*Plainwell.* It was very unnecessary to make me run half over the town, and without my breakfast.

*Level.* I beg your pardon most heartily.

*Plainwell.* Well, well, never mind, we'll return it—after dinner.

*Mrs.*



*Mrs. L.* Did you borrow it, then?

*Plainwell.* To be sure.

*Mrs. L.* Generous man!

*Level.* Well, my dear, are you convinced?

*Mrs. L.* I am,—Let us keep company with our equals.

*Plainwell.* This is all mighty well; but I'm half famish'd—where's the dinner?

*John.* I believe I must bring Mr. Plainwell's knife and fork back again; must not I, Madam?

*Mrs. L.* Ay, to be sure.

*Level.* And the best wine in the cellar, John; such friends are most heartily welcome wherever they come.

[*Exeunt omnes.*]

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